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ABSTRACT

This paper describes two different English programs for international students at the American Language Institute in San Diego, California. One is English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and the other is Intensive English for Communication (IEC). The paper focuses on one teacher's experiences teaching IEC writing after 2 years of teaching EAP academic writing. She has students produce a class magazine. This communicative writing project allows students to write about topics in which they are interested, and it is very low-cost to the students. The project's four phases are planning (deciding on the audience to write for, the kinds of writing to include, and due dates for each article); working (writing articles, movie reviews, and advertisements); editing the magazine contents as a group; and producing the magazine. Until the final stage, the teacher only has to act as a guide and advisor, but in the final phase, the teacher should become much more involved. (SM)

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ED 474 367

Improve Your Students' Writing with a Class Magazine

At the American Language Institute in San Diego, there are two different English programs for international students. One is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and the other is Intensive English for Communication (IEC). After two years of teaching EAP academic writing at different levels with assigned texts, I was scheduled to teach IEC writing. I became a little nervous when I found that there was no text assigned for my class; however, while searching for something suitable I found the idea of having the students produce a class magazine.

A class magazine is a communicative writing project that allows the students to write about topics in which they are interested. The topics require minimal, if any, research, and because they are chosen by the students themselves, the topics hold the students' interest. The magazine works well at every level with minor modifications, and is appropriate for intensive writing programs, especially when there is no satisfactory text available.

An advantage of the class magazine is the very low cost to the students. The students must buy a paper report cover with three prong fasteners, to be used as the cover of their copy of the magazine. These covers cost approximately $1.00, which is much easier to afford than the typical $30 text.

There are four phases to the process. Phase I is the planning stage, Phase II is the work stage, Phase III is the editing stage, and Phase IV is the production stage. The teacher need be only a guide and adviser until the last phase, in which the magazine is physically put together.

Phase I

The first step we take in my class is to decide on the audience we will write for. In a mixed-interest ESL class, the audience will always be a general one; however, it is important to create the notion of audience. For many students, the only audience for their work is the teacher, but because most of our IEC students return to their home countries after only a short time, it is essential to provide projects that offer practice with genuine skills.

The next decision is the kinds of writing to include in the magazine. I ask the class to think about the general content of magazines. They brainstorm in pairs for about

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five minutes, and then I write their suggestions on the board. The students' suggestions range from recipes to movie reviews and political issues, from fashion articles to computer advice to travel and sports reports. Then each student chooses approximately four topics to write about and submit during the term. For instance, a student may decide to write about computers, baseball, his or her home country, and cooking. The student must then narrow his or her general topics appropriately so that the papers will not exceed three pages.

The final step of Phase I is to set the due dates for each article to be submitted. The time estimated for each submission depends on the level of the students in the class and on the number of revisions they must make before the teacher deems the article finished. I usually require a minimum of two revisions, one for content and one for language, and I allow one week for each revision. The students may continue to revise until the final deadline to improve the grade that they earn.

Phase II

In Phase II, the students write. The class magazine project allows the teacher to determine what and how much to teach about writing for their chosen audience (i.e., English-speaking Americans). When the students are more advanced and have completed several writing courses, they are more familiar with the expectations of American readers for the writers to progress more or less linearly with clearly stated objectives and concept relationships. If your class is intermediate or below, or the students have not taken many writing classes here, then they may be less familiar with these cultural issues of style. You may wish to present a model or two and analyze the organization and development of the topic, as needed. You will be able to see what the students need as you read their papers during the term.

I handle language and grammar issues in a similar way. Once I receive and go over the first submission, I can decide which structures are most troublesome and present a lesson to cover those difficult areas. You may opt to assign a grammar reference text for the course and use it as the source for grammar lessons, or you may choose to provide your own handouts for that purpose.

In addition to their chosen articles, all students in my class write two other items: a brief movie review and an advertisement. We examine movie reviews that I bring in from a few different newspapers and magazines and decide what a review must include and what it must not include. The students then choose their movies to review. If your school has a good library of videos, you may decide to have the students choose from that resource. Otherwise, they should choose a movie currently in the theaters.

The other short item is an advertisement, which is done in pairs. I bring in several different pictures taken from newspapers, magazines, and sometimes the Internet. I do not allow the students to search for their own pictures because the temptation to lift the ad in its entirety is too great. Each team must choose one of the pictures I provide, decide what product could fit with the picture, and come up with the advertisement. I cut away

all words and any symbols that might lead the students in any way. One very creative ad arose from a picture of just a pair of eyes. The students decided to use the picture to advertise a home security system.

Phase III

Toward the end of the term, after the students have submitted the final article, the students begin to put the magazine together. This is the phase that students often enjoy the most. They do all of the work: they choose which articles, movie reviews and advertisements to include, how to group the different items and in what order the items will appear, and how each section of the magazine will look. The only restrictions I place on the students are that there must be one article from every student, that there must be two advertisements in each section, and that there must be a cover or divider sheet for each section of the magazine. At ALI we do this work during one or two class periods spent in the computer lab. It is important to state clearly, several times, that the final papers must have no staples or clips and be absolutely free of any handwritten comments or changes. Then put all the items into one final magazine packet for copying.

Phase IV

Now the teacher has the most involvement in the project. This phase is the production of the magazine, and you should collect the purchased three-pronged paper report covers from the students at this time. You have a couple of options at this time. If you have no limit to the number of copies you can make, you can run the original magazine packet through the copier yourself. If your copying is limited, you could take the packet to a professional copier such as Kinko's.

For the cover of my students' magazines, I have used one of the art programs at ALI to find a picture of a blank scroll. I have then typed the students' names onto the picture and included the name of our class and the year. Adding a class photo to the cover of the magazine is nice because everyone can see and remember the other students who worked on the magazine during the term.

Once you have the magazine copied, affix the cover to the front of the paper report cover the students purchased and insert the contents securely. I tried having the students put the covers on the magazine packets themselves, but the students were more pleased when I handed them a finished product in the final class meeting. On the last day of class we usually have a party and I hand out the copies of the magazine. All students now have a tangible product that is more than just a souvenir. Their magazine is the record of the students' work and progress in writing in English. I am sure that you will see noticeable growth in the students' critical analysis and writing skills during the course of the class magazine project.

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